

PROTECTING OUR IMPOVERISHED SENIORS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Massachusetts [Mr. MARKEY] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me.

In my 19 years in Congress, Mr. Speaker, I have never taken a special order before. This is the first time I have ever done so. The reason that I do it is that unfortunately, the Speaker of the House, the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. GINGRICH], in making his final remarks for the Republicans to this great House on the historic Medicare bill, invoked my name several times and attributed to me a motive to deliberately mislead this House with regard to the fact of whether or not the 11 million widows in the United States who live on an income of under \$8,000 a year have protection, to ensure that they will not have to shoulder the burden of the dramatic increase in their part B premiums that has been included in the Republican Medicare reform.

The Speaker stated that, in fact, I should have done my homework in order to know that they are covered, and that in fact it was misleading to say that they were not covered, and that all who are below the poverty level have their premiums covered under the law of the United States.

Well, technically speaking, the Speaker is correct. They are covered under existing law, and the Speaker will continue to be correct for at least 5 more days, or until next Tuesday when the Republican Medicaid bill comes on to the floor which strips out the protection and the extra subsidy which those below the poverty level receive for their Medicare part B premium. At that point at which the Medicaid bill of the Republicans hits the floor, there will be no protections for those widows across this country numbering 11 million who are on Medicare and who will see their premiums increase over the next 7 years by a traumatic amount in order to put aside a huge fund for the tax breaks for the wealthy.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MARKEY. I yield to the gentleman from Maryland.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the gentleman. Is the gentleman telling me when the Speaker got up on the floor and said that in their bill there was a guarantee that anybody under \$7,900 would have there Medicare premium part B paid, that he was not accurate?

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, he was not accurate because the Republican Medicaid bill, which will be out here on the floor next week, will strip out that guarantee. In the Republican Medicaid bill, as you know, they block-grant the Medicaid program, cut the whole program by 20 percent, send it back to the States, and in fact repeal every requirement that we in this Congress

have put on the books to protect those elderly seniors.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield further, does the gentleman then mean that the only way to have ensured that seniors under \$7,900 would not have their premium increased was to vote for the motion to recommit?

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is correct. The only way to guarantee that they will be protected.

Now, let me add as well that in our committee we had a vote on an amendment made by the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] to protect them. On a party line vote all Republicans voted not to protect the seniors. On the Medicare bill we did the same thing with an amendment by the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. RUSH] to protect the senior, more impoverished elderly, those widows, so that they would not have to pay the premium.

So I assume, to be quite frank with the gentleman, the Speaker is a busy man and he does not have time to peruse each and every piece of legislation. That is the only conclusion that I can reach and be, I think, noncontentious in terms of what he might have intended.

Mr. Speaker, next week the Medicaid bill goes before the Committee on Rules, and we intend on making this amendment, one that we request the Committee on Rules to put in order on the floor next week as part of the Medicaid bill. If the Speaker wants to ensure that every senior impoverished widow in America is protected, we will have an opportunity in the committee on Rules to have that amendment put in order, and every Member out here on the floor, if the Republicans put that amendment in order, will have a chance to make true what it was the Speaker said on the floor today. Otherwise, there will be no protection.

Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for clarifying that issue.

Mr. MARKEY. I thank the gentleman from Maryland very much.

SPEAKER WILL DO HONORABLE THING

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California [Mr. WAXMAN] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Speaker of the House, Mr. GINGRICH, did not understand the bill that the Republicans reported out of the Committee on Commerce; but since he made the claim that the bill would protect those individuals, low-income individuals, to help them pay for their Medicare out-of-pocket costs, I would expect that he will support the amendment that was offered in our committee by the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE].

The Pallone amendment would have given an assurance, an absolute guarantee, that if you are below the poverty line, your out-of-pocket Medicare

costs, the premium, the co-insurance costs, will be picked up. If we do not have that kind of protection, a lot of people will not be able to buy part B. They will not be covered under Medicare. Low-income elderly just will not be part of the Medicare program that assures their physicians' fees.

Now, let me go through what their bill does. In their Medigra bill, they repeal Medicaid completely. Their bill does not ensure people below the poverty line will have their Medicare premium paid.

What they say to the States is, spend some portion of your block grant funds to pay Medicare premiums for poor people. But the amount they are supposed to spend for that purpose, and let us be clear. There is no way to enforce even that requirement, there is not enough to cover people up to the poverty level, let alone to the 120 percent of poverty we require the States to pay now.

With the cuts in the growth of the funds for the Medigra program, with the growth in the eligibles for Medicare, which is a growing elderly population in this Nation, with the big increases in premiums absolutely guaranteed by the passage of this Medicare bill, which will require more premiums, maybe even doubling of the premiums to be paid by the elderly, we will never be able to see the States cover the people who are below the poverty line.

I would like to give some numbers. The Republican Medicaid block grant repeals the requirement that States pay cost-sharing for low-income Medicare beneficiaries. However, the Republican proposal requires that States set aside 85 percent of what the States would have spent on premiums, not all cost-sharing, from 1992 to 1994. The premium for 1992 was \$31.80; in 1993, \$34.60; 1994, \$41.10. NEWT GINGRICH himself estimates that the premium will be \$88 in the year 2002.

With that kind of an increase in the premium, with a growing increase in the number of the elderly, the States are setting aside only 85 percent of the amount for the 1991-1992 levels. They are not going to be able to pay for the out-of-pocket costs for the elderly.

Furthermore, once they repeal Medicaid, which is what they seek to do next week and replace it with a Medigra, a block grant bill, the States will get money. They can use it as they see fit. There will be a set-aside of money for this purpose, but it will be grossly inadequate, and the States will have to use that money as they see fit.

They could say to people, "We will cover you if you are in line, but when we run out of money you will not get covered." They could say, "We will only cover 10 percent of the costs instead of 100 percent of those premium and out-of-pocket costs." They can refuse to pay people for their out-of-pocket costs entirely.